(c) India welcomed this initiative of economic cooperation involving the four countries of South Asia and has participated in the Foreign Secretary-level meeting held at Kathmandu on April 2, 1997. It was agreed at the meeting that the objective of the "growth quadrangle" is to create an enabling environment for rapid economic development through identification and implementation of specific projects of cooperation in the core economic sectors of multi-modal transportation and communication, energy, trade and investment facilitation and promotion, tourism, natural resources and environment.

The Foreign Ministers of the four countries met in New Delhi on April 8, 1997 and formally launched the sub-regional economic cooperation initiative. They reaffirmed their commitment to pursue sub-regional economic cooperation for accelerating economic growth, overcoming infrastructural constraints and making optimal use of sub-regional complementaries.

Death of Indian Hajis in Mecca

3503. SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA:
SHRI PARAG CHALIHA:
SHRI SHIV CHARAN SINGH:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether a large number of Indian Hajis (pilgrims) to Mecca died in fire that broke out there last week;

(b) if so, the details of the deceased and of the wounded; and

(c) the details of efforts made by Government to bring the survivors safe to India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP): (a) and (b) The fire that broke out in the pilgrim camps in Mina near Mecca on April 15, 1997, led to a number of casualties among the Indian pilgrims. As of today the total number of identified dead is 119 and the number of injured persons receiving treatment in Saudi Government hospitals is 148. In addition another 265 persons were injured in the fire. Of this number, 172 are receiving treatment from the Indian medical mission in Mecca. The total number of injured is estimated at approximately a little over 400.

(c) Government has offered to fly back to India all our injured pilgrims who were medically fit to travel by a special charter flight. However, the injured pilgrims have preferred to complete their stay in Mecca as previously scheduled and to return to India by their assigned charter flights. Those pilgrims who lost their travel documents in the fire are issued duplicate documents expeditiously and free of cost. Several of the injured who were discharged earlier after receiving treatment in hospitals have since returned to India. Other are awaiting their assigned return flights for India as per the Haj charter schedule. These pilgrims continue to be under observation by the Indian medical mission deployed in Mecca and Madina and are being rendered necessary medical care until their scheduled flights. The Haj charter flights have commenced the return journey of pilgrims beginning from 21 April. The last of the pilgrims will return by May 22. On an average 1600 pilgrims are returning to India every day. As of date about 20,000 pilgrims have reached India. Names of injured pilgrims on each return flight are being conveyed in advance by Air India office in Jeddah so as to facilitate their reception on arrival in Delhi and other entry points as well as prompt medical attention to them and their movement to hospitals and clinics as required. The reception of the pilgrims returning to India is being handled by the concerned State Haj Committee in coordination with MEA, Air India, immigration and customs authorities.

Envoys recruited from among politicians

3504. SHRI PARAG CHALIHA:
SHRI SHIV CHARAN SINGH:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether a number of envoys/Ambassadors etc. is recruited from among politicians/intellectuals etc. without any competitive test etc. for Indian Foreign Services;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the names of such appointees as on date?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP): (a) and (b) Ambassadors/High Commissioners are appointed on the basis of their suitability, relevant experience and eminence. In a few exceptional cases, Ambassadors/High Commissioners have been appointed from outside the Foreign Service for their recognized eminence and experience. The competetive examination is meant for the Foreign Service Office at the time of their recruitment to Service and is not applicable to the non-career Ambassadors/High Commissioners.

(c) At present, seven Missions are headed by Ambassadors/High Commissioners who are non-diplomats or retired civil servants namely, S/Shri L.M. Singhvi, Naresh Chandra, Kushok Bakula, D.S. Pannun, M.H. Ansari, Gopal K. Gandhi and Prabhakara Jha.

Harassment of Indians in Saudi Arabia

3505. SHRIMATI BASANTI SARMA:
DR. SHRIKANT RAMACHANDRA JICHKAR:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to cases of harassment of Indians in Saudi Arabia;

(b) whether some Indians have been reported missing in Saudi Arabia since 5th February, 1997; and

(c) if so, the step taken to trace them?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP): (a) Yes, Sir. Government's attention has been drawn to some instances of harassment of Indians by their private sponsors arising out of change in sponsorship, non-payment of contracted salary, change in terms of contract, etc. These complaints are brought to the attention of Embassy of India, Riyadh/Consulate General of India, Jeddah directly by the Indian employees or their well-wishers or through the Ministry.

(b) Six Indians are reportedly missing in Saudi Arabia since 5.2.1997.

In addition, one, Shri B.D. Baliga who was employed as Materials Manager in Eastern Petro Chemicals, Jubail, Saudi Arabia was reported missing as of 5.2.1997. Subsequently, the Embassy learnt that he had been detained at the airport for unauthorisedly possessing some documents belonging to his employer. Through the efforts of the Embassy, Shri B.D. Baliga has been released and has returned to India.

(c) Whenever any Indian is reported missing, the matter is promptly taken up with the Saudi Foreign Ministry. Simultaneously, contacts are established with sponsors and local Indians who are known to him.

गुट निरपेक्ष आंदोलन के देशों की समस्याएं

3506. **डा० महेश चन्द्र शर्मा:** क्या प्रधान मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि:

(क) क्या 7 अप्रैल, 1997 को आयोजित गुट निरपेक्ष आंदोलन के बारहवें मंत्री-स्तरीय सम्मेलन के उद्घाटन सत्र में दिये गये भाषण में यह कहा गया है, "यह खेद का विषय है कि इस महत्वपूर्ण मोड़ पर हमारे ऊपर नये प्रश्न, प्रतिबंध और शर्तें आरोपित किये जा रहे हैं";

(ख) यदि हां, तो इन प्रश्नों, प्रतिबंधों और शर्तों का ब्यौरा क्या है;

(ग) ऐसे नये प्रश्न, प्रतिबंध व शर्तें आरोपित करने वाले प्राधिकारियों और निकायों के नाम क्या हैं; और